New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

Volume XIV, Number 10 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of April 27, 1953

1953 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1952 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
Bernardine	231
*Children's Hour (The)	151
Deep Blue Sea (The)	207
*Dial M for Murder	215
*Evening with Beatrice Lillie (An)	254
Male Animal (The)	297
Mrs. McThing	359
My Darlin' Aida	218
New Faces of 1952	278
Pal Joey	398
*Seven Year Itch (The)	186
*Time of the Cuckoo (The)	235
*Time Out for Ginger	177
Two's Company	157
Whistler's Grandmother	160
*Wish You Were Here	266

1951 Vol.

*Fourposter (The)	190
*King and I (The)	304
*Moon Is Blue (The)	322

1950 Vol.

*Guys and Dolls	185

1949 Vol.

*South Pacific	312

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 27, 1953*

1953 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1953
Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Bat (The)	390
Be Your Age	397
*Bleak House	315
*Camino Real	330
*Crucible (The)	383
*Date With April (A)	318
Emperor's Clothes (The)	368
*Fifth Season (The)	380
*Hazel Flagg	362
Horses in Midstream	325
John Brown's Body	358
*Love of Four Colonels (The)	394
Love's Labour's Lost	372
Maggie	351
Merchant of Venice (The)	340
Mid-Summer	386
*Misalliance	354
*My 3 Angels	334
On Borrowed Time	365
*Picnic	348
Pink Elephant (The)	312
*Porgy and Bess	337
Room Service	322
Touchstone	375
*Wonderful Town	344
CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD	320

Theatre Openings
"Bleak House" "The Pink Elephant"
"A Date With April"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 27, 1953*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Pink Elephant"

New York Post

April 23, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Farce About the Republicans

All sorts of dire things take place in the theater when the season is tapering off. One of them is John G. Fuller's farce, "The Pink Elephant," which somehow acquired three producers and quite a number of good actors and managed to get itself produced at the hospitable Playhouse last night.

To lose no time about a verdict, it was terrible, but, despite its repulsiveness, its presence on Broadway does bring up a few matters that may be worth brooding about.

For one thing, it endears itself to a reviewer by frankly confessing that it is a farce. For some obscure reason, playwrights these days are afraid of such a candid description of what they have written. However frantic their narratives may be, they insist on calling them comedies or, even more sheepishly, plays. It is splendidly disarming of Mr. Fuller to recognize that a farce is a perfectly honorable category of playwriting and to admit boldly that this is what his work is.

Hint of Politics

Then there is the evidence that Mr. Fuller originally wrote not only a farce but a political farce. This, too, is a worthy tradition of American dramaturgy, as a school of eminent authors from Charles Hoyt to George S. Kaufman has handsomely proved. From its title to a few of its remaining scenes, there are occasional signs that "The Pink Elephant" originally set out to be a satirical play based on the amiably fantastic idea that some liberal Republicans persuaded President Eisenhower to select a Democrat as his roving Ambassador at large.

From time to time, this provocative idea attempts to raise its interesting head. At least, there is buried in the evening the conception that there is a battle between the liberal and conservative Republicans, with the encouraging conclusion that even the most hidebound of reactionaries is shocked when he finds that a slimy fellow who wants to smear the opposition as a bunch of lecherous Reds is on his side. But you have to look fairly hard to find this in the play now.

What you find in the current incarnation of "The Pink Elephant" is more difficult to describe. Let me say that it has been changed from a political farce to a sex farce, and let it go at that. Because the play, as it currently emerges, is short on consecutive story and terribly long on people darting around, getting drunk, falling asleep in embarrassing proximity to one another, making frantic telephone calls, pretending that they are very amorous, and looking comically alarmed.

The producers seem to have decided that, if everyone rushed about enough, it would conceal the fact that little of interest is taking place. As usual, the players work valiantly. Steve Allen, of television, is at least pleasant as a rebellious ghost writer for the reactionaries, while Howard Smith, that invariably fine actor, splutters entertainingly as the baffled conservative, Bruce Gordon gives life to the role of an embarrassed wolf, and Heywood Hale Broun is wonderfully comic as an ineffectual exponent of the smear. But their cause is hopeless.

"THE PINK ELEPHANT"

Farce by John G. Fuller; staged by Harry Ellerbe; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Guy Kent; presented by Eugene Paul, William I. Kaufman and Blair Walliser at the Playhouse Theatre, April 22, 1953. The cast:

Sonny Bannerman..Bruce Gordon
Priscilla.....Joel Wesley
Jerry Elliot.....Steve Allen
Bellhop.....Lee Krieger
Lee Meredith...Patricia Barry
Peggy Boyd.....Jean Casto
Two-gun Anderson..Arthur Tell Evans.....Martin Tarby
Gilbert Parker....David White
Henry C. Griffin..Howard Smith
Reporter.....John O'Hare
Second Bellhop....Jon Richards
Ed Glennon..Heywood Hale Broun
Night Watchman..Charles Pratt
Bubbles LeTroy..Roslyn Valero
A Visitor.....Martin Tarby
Maid.....Suki Rayner

Journal American

April 23, 1953

Some of It Is Funny But Most of It Isn't

By JOHN McCLAIN

STEVE ALLEN is an enormously relaxed and ingratiating comedian, and so it is regrettable that he chose to make his Broadway debut at the Playhouse last night in a slapstick mish-mash entitled "The Pink Elephant." Instead of creating a character for Allen, the author, John G. Fuller, has relied upon gags and gimmicks.

There are endless complications involving guns, fur pieces, cameras, drinks, Kleenex, Alka Seltzer and books; doors bang and phones ring incessantly and there is a constant parade from corridor to bedroom to bath.

Everybody in the cast has a staggering repertoire of jokes, few of which evolve from situation, and the thread of a plot becomes hopelessly snarled from the moment it is unwound.

In the midst of this maelstrom, Allen and Patricia Barry, a decorative and extremely competent ingenue, struggle heroically to bring some semblance of honesty to the proceedings.

For a few brief moments they nearly succeed, but a second later the door flies off the hinges and the mood is exploded by a comedy bellboy, a "prop" Texan, or one of the many other loud and reminiscent types in the troupe.

It seemed, at times, that Allen was himself aware of the sombre quality of his material. After delivering one notably archaic joke involving a hangover he was heard to remark, "I know, it's a bad joke—but so is my head."

What passes for the story line in Fuller's farce concerns the efforts of a crusading member of the Republican National Committee to have a Democrat appointed to an important government post.

Steve Allen is a former newspaperman who is currently employed to write the speeches for the old line boss who is opposed to the appointment. Miss Barry naturally comes along in time to expose a plot to smear the crusading committeeman, at the same time falling in love and regenerating Allen.

All of this takes place in three rooms separated by highly imaginary walls, and the confusion is heightened by the fact that on several occasions the political plot is being advanced by a couple of characters on one side of the stage while the two lovers are getting on with their romance at the same time, practically between syllables, on the other side. It's a little like watching a tennis match—hard on the neck.

On the brighter perimeter it must be noted that some of the jokes ARE funny, that the cast is uniformly first class. Jean Casto is consistently dour and brittle as the companion of Miss Barry; Heywood Hale Broun is hilarious in the role of an insidious smear merchant; Roslyn Valero delivers a socko scene as a peel artist and Howard Smith, late of "Mid-Summer," is plausibly bullying and bombastic in the role of the chief politico.

And so it's quite a shame. Allen has great charm and he can act; I shall look forward to seeing him return in something which permits him to be himself.

Daily Mirror

April 23, 1953

'Pink Elephant' Opens At the Playhouse

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The producing firm of Eugene Paul, William I. Kaufman and Blair Walliser brought air star Steve Allen to the Playhouse last evening in "The Pink Elephant," a farce by John G. Fuller. The ingratiating Steve was making his Broadway bow in the new arrival. We only wish the latter had been as good as Allen.

"The Pink Elephant" has to do with an ex-newspaperman turned speech writer for a political stuffed shirt. He is selling his conscience and integrity to earn enough to buy a boat in which to flee to the Bahamas, when he meets the prettier half of a femme team dedicated to the demonstration and sale of a shampoo curling agent.

THE GIRL discovers a nasty scheme by a smear artist to destroy the reputation of a Republican progressive. Even her boy friend's stodgy boss is appalled. So she awakens the ghost writer to his duty, which is double-barrelled: to thwart the plot and marry her. The high cost of living being what it is, the schooner and flight to the tropics will have to wait.

Fuller has devised some hectic situations, and penned a goodly quota of hilarious lines. But he has forgotten to develop his characters to the extent that they are credible and gain the understanding of the customers. In a shrinking and demanding theatre, you must achieve plausibility. When you do, it's comedy. When you don't, it's farce.

Allen, tall, lumbering, besoectacled and likable, does infinitely more for "The Pink Elephant" than it does for him. He has the easy assurance that comes with years of experience on radio and TV. He almost succeeds in persuading you that ghost Jerry Elliot is a real person. That's quite a feat.

• • •

PATRICIA BARRY is most attractive as the idealistic romantic who thinks she knows what she wants and goes after it. She has several difficult scenes to play. Notably, one in which she imbibes too much and passes out. And she brings them off exceptionally well.

Heywood Hale Broun gives the best performance of his career as the wacky smear artist. It is frighteningly detailed and very funny. Roslyn Valero also gives you the shudders as a marvelously amusing burlesque bubble dancer. Howard Smith, who was outstanding in "Death of a Salesman," and Jean Casto, who was likewise in the original "Pal Joey," are first-rate as the hide-bound political boss and the hard-boiled half of the shampoo sales team.

Salutes are also due Bruce Gordon, Joel Wesley, Lee Krieger, Arthur Tell, David White and John O'Hare. O'Hare hasn't much to do, except stick his head into doors that open easily at unexpected moments. But he's really an excellent actor. He has good looks and knows what to do on a stage. He's worth the attention of the talent scouts.

• • •

HARRY ELLERBE, with an assist from Ezra Stone, has paced the farce so expertly and speedily as to gloss over many of its faults. Ralph Alswang has designed an amazing set, with three hotel rooms and a hall yet, all on the same stage. This permits fluidity of movement. They gave Alswang quite a problem, but he solved it with ingenuity.

There's so much to like about "The Pink Elephant," that we regret there isn't enough. For, to tell the truth, it's likely to prove another White Elephant for the Playhouse. A case of—"It might have been." But it ain't.

New York Herald Tribune

April 23, 1953

THEATER

'The Pink Elephant'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN THE course of the Pink Elephant," which opened at the Playhouse Wednesday, a blonde named Bubbles Le Troy goes into a grind so devastating as to blow the cap off a popeyed bellboy, a hung-over young couple reel into the morning air without the faintest recollection of what happened on that double bed last night, and practically everybody in the company takes turns reaching for the telephone and picking up a fox fur instead. There are also innumerable references to a product known as Alka-Seltzer, including the venerable "No thanks, I don't want any. I couldn't stand the noise."

All this, I am embarrassed to say, takes place in the pursuit of some extraordinarily noble motives: the liberalization of the Republican party, the exposure and repudiation of the practise of 'character assassination,' and the political unification of our beloved, but here rather stupefyingly served, country.

It has been John G. Fuller's notion to write a timely farce which might, in and out among the reputed laughs, make a point or two. On a Saturday night just before a special meeting of the Republican National Committee, we are introduced to the occupants of three adjoining Kansas City hotel rooms: an unreconstructed mossback who isn't going to let the President name a Democrat to some position or other; a ghost writer who is busier with his binoculars—he's on an inside court—than with his history-making phrases; and an addle-pated young actress who isn't bright enough to put the right end of a cork-tipped cigarette in her mouth but who is able to spot 'integrity' the minute she sees it and thereby save the nation.

• • •

There isn't much point in detailing the rather primitive political humors of Mr. Fuller's piece ("Why, that's ridiculous! It's like Westbrook Pegler waltzing with Eleanor Roosevelt!") except perhaps to note that some of the queasier comic moments in all history are devoted to the machinations of a grinning, ferret-like little 'smear' specialist who has discovered—this is about as trenchant as the comment gets—both a hammer and a sickle in an old photograph of his opponent's grandfather's farm. Though Heywood Hale Broun plays the part ably enough, it doesn't precisely lend itself to exuberant hilarity.

Not that there's much hilarity when the author is soft-pedaling his political conscience and playing it strictly for gags. Mr. Fuller is fond of a fairly simple verbal inversion:

"Shut my mouth if it isn't Bubbles Le Troy!"

"Well, it is Bubbles Le Troy, so shut your mouth!"

Or, for a slightly more involved sample:

"You're always exaggerating!"

"But I'm only human."

"There you go again—exaggerating!"

After a couple of hours of this ("I'm not afraid." "That's What I'm afraid of!") you sort of get to spotting the technique, and wishing you hadn't. And when the author does switch his style ("It's a C. O. D. party—Come Over Drunk") you find yourself urging him back to his first happy rut.

There is one cheerful note in the proceedings, though. His name is Steve Allen, he is a late-night raconteur on radio and TV, and he moves about the stage in a fantastically quiet, agreeably unaggressive style. As the ghost writer who is brought to see the light, Mr. Allen works quickly, deftly, and with no visible despair. He is a resourceful pantomimist, though the script doesn't ask him to pantomime much more than the business of crawling out of bed with a hangover, and he submits valiantly whenever that fox fur is hurled into his face. (Why he doesn't go right on into the rest of the routine, stamping at it with his feet until dead, I don't know; the author is not averse to echoes of the Pantages Time.)

• • •

And there's a bright, pretty ingenue in Patricia Barry, a relative newcomer who performs the remarkable feat of making Mr. Fuller's simultaneously dimbrained and politically perceptive heroine entirely attractive. Howard Smith is asked to roar his throat dry, Jean Casto must wrestle once more with the wise-cracking girl friend, and David White is the silver-haired committeeman who carries the day for unity, integrity, and uplift.

Designer Ralph Alswang's hotel rooms are nicely dovetailed. It's the goings-on, and the not-comings-off, that hurt.

The New York Times

April 23, 1953

'The Pink Elephant,' Farce by John G. Fuller, Has Its Premiere at The Playhouse

John G. Fuller, a playwright hitherto unknown to Broadway, has written a farce which he calls "The Pink Elephant." It was acted at The Playhouse last night and, along with the weather, may be recorded as one of this spring's latest aberrations. For Mr. Fuller, at this point in his career, simply lacks inventive imagination. In place of resourcefulness and rapid-moving situations, he has chosen for the most part to rely upon routine jokes. The result is long stretches of aridity, the fatal flaw in farce.

On the chance that historians may wonder about the significance of Mr. Fuller's title, it refers to the fears some Old Guard Republicans have concerning the President's wish to appoint a Democrat as one of his aides. If he succeeds, the pachyderm emblem of the party will become tinted. One of the stalwarts, on the eve of a special meeting of the party's national committee, is determined to unite his colleagues against such heresy. There also is a ghost writer employed by the politician. The ghost writer is a cynical chap interested only in writing for money. And there is a nice, wholesome girl who manages to stir decent scruples in the ghost writer's heart.

"The Pink Elephant" also for the record marks the debut on the local stage of Steve Allen, playing the role of the ghost writer. Mr. Allen is a young man who has made a reputation for himself as one of television's ad-lib artists. A tall fellow, wearing dark-rimmed glasses, he delivers lines in deadpan fashion, but he probably would be happier if he could make them up as he went along. In "The Pink Elephant" he does not get much of a chance to show what he can do.

Mr. Allen is not alone in his predicament. He has a large cast for company, among them that reliable veteran, Howard Smith, as the old line party man. Since Mr. Smith appreciates the requirements of farce he manages to collect a few guffaws for his blustering and bellowing. Patricia Barry does well in the role of the sweet young thing and Heyward Hale Broun lightens the proceedings somewhat as a lean and hungry-looking conniver.

The program credits Harry Ellerbe with the direction and there is an acknowledgment for help rendered by Ezra Stone. But "The Pink Elephant" just wouldn't move.

L. F.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 23, 1953

Pink Elephant' Is Jumbo Farce

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Pink Elephant" is a farce with more natural disadvantages than any play offered along Broadway for a long time.

It is a disheveled and persistent affair. Really a series of brief sketches, it is loosely strung together in a distracting manner.

The audience laughed and applauded last night like good little backers. Some of this amusement was hysterical, and other reaction was openly and audibly defiant.

This is a type of comedy which television has nourished. It involves an actor's balancing foreign objects on his head, or otherwise repating some ancient chestnut with an elaborate air of apology. If you can imagine two or more hours of that sort of foolery you will have a keen notion about "The Pink Elephant."

Somewhere deep down beneath all the strained reaching for laughs, there is suggested a legitimate target for satire in the bland way character can be assassinated in political circles these days. This facet of the play is seldom referred to. The author prefers to deal with strip-teasing call girls and gargantuan hangovers.

The principal billing goes to Steve Allen, best known for TV activities. He is agreeable enough as a ghost writer for several political aspirants at a Kansas City convention. His vocal delivery is so casual he often might be breathing in, instead of exhaling, to make his words. It may be desperation that leads him into repeating anything that seemed funny once, four or five times.

This talent is not always to his advantage. The only imaginative comedy creation of the play is contributed by Heywood Hale Broun in a nervous and maniacal portrait of the sort of eccentric who destroys reputations by imputation.

Patricia Barry is pretty and earnest as one of those stock virgins who pretends to wish she was something else. Jean Casto delivers her payoff lines as directly as a champion bowler, as the other half of a team of shampoo demonstrators. Howard Smith looks as if he might have apoplexy any minute as he lets his temper fly in the role of an old-school politician.

DAILY NEWS

April 23, 1953

Steve Allen, Patricia Barry Show Talent in Clumsy 'Pink Elephant'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The advance word on "The Pink Elephant," which opened last evening at the Playhouse, labeled it as a satire on politics—something about the Republicans wanting a Democratic ambassador-at-large. Actually, the piece is an erratic, old-style, slap-dash farce, with just enough good stuff in it to keep it alive and to make me wish it were better. About 80% better.

The author, John G. Fuller, has chosen as his locale three rooms in a Kansas City hotel during a Republican National Committee conclave. Ralph Alswang, an ingenious stage designer, has managed to put three servicable hotel rooms on one stage, and the program acknowledges Robert K. Christenberry, our state boxing commissioner and a Broadway boniface, as a technical consultant.

Two Good Newcomers.

I wish John G. Fuller had called in somebody — George Abbott, George Kaufman or George Spelvin—as a technical consultant for his end of the play, for Mr. Fuller seems unable to distinguish between good jokes and bad jokes or old ones and new ones. With the bad and old ones out, "The Pink Elephant" could be enjoyable farce, and it does have an enjoyable cast.

I recommend with enthusiasm Steve Allen and Patricia Barry for parts in a more hopeful play. Allen, a radio and TV veteran who is making his local debut as a 3-D actor, is an astute young man of handsome appearance, a dead pan and an admirable way of timing his jokes. Miss Barry, who has masqueraded as Patricia White in the movies, is a very fetching young redhead with considerable ability as a comedienne.

Allen plays a newspaperman who has sold his soul to a politician for whom he writes speeches. Miss Barry is a girl from the corn belt who has come to the big city to demonstrate a shampoo in a chain store in furtherance of an ambition to become an actress. As "The Pink Elephant" switches from room to room in the Hotel Alswang-Christenberry, one encounters a few more able comedians who should be having something better and sharper to work with.

Results Are Erratic.

One of the best of these is Heywood Hale Broun, in the role of a sly and sinister political conniver. Howard Smith puts satisfactory bluster into the role of a GOP windbag, Bruce Gordon is occasionally funny as a party stooge and Jean Casto makes a dry and caustic roommate for Miss Barry.

Harry Ellerbe, the director, has managed some fast and ludicrous scenes and mismanaged several others—but the basic trouble with "The Pink Elephant" is the author's inability to resist a gag. Any gag, from radio, TV, night clubs or old frolics like "Animal Crackers." If his play had fewer of these it would be funnier.

"Bleak House"

New York Herald Tribune
April 21, 1953

THEATER

'Bleak House'

By WALTER F. KERR

I THINK it would take Detective-Inspector Bucket himself to track down the plot of "Bleak House" in the new evenings which Emlyn Williams has prepared for us, but it doesn't take much knowledge of Dickens, or any pre-committed fervor, to enjoy the gallery of affectionate caricatures which come to preposterous life on the Bijou stage.

In his advance announcements, Mr. Williams explained that he had taken the massive novel—about twenty-five times as much material as could be managed by a platform reader in two and one-half hours—and cut it to a single story line: the 'mysterious secret' surrounding the imperious Lady Dedlock, her blackmail at the hands of the wily Tulkinghorn, and the pistol shot which brings that scoundrel's career to an end. If some of the flamboyant figures who clutter up the novel were to be introduced into this solo performance, they were to be admitted only as very brief interruptions in a hotly pursued narrative.

This is by no means an accurate description of what Williams once more dressed as Dickens himself, is doing. The narrative has receded far, far into the background until it becomes little more than a device for opening and closing each of the three acts. And, with apparently uncontrollable gusto, the incidental fantastics—the Chadbands, the Badgers, Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, and Harold Skimpole—have huffed, sniffed, roared and bleated their ways forward to dominate the confused, but frequently very funny, enterprise.

Thus a garrulous biddy rattling off a stream of inconsequential nonsense at a coroner's inquest becomes a small gem of portraiture, more striking in her momentary appearance than are the principals at slightly greater length. Sir Leicester Dedlock contemplating his own greatness ("It is an advantage to a man to have so inexhaustible a subject") is immensely amusing. The Reverend Mr. Chadband stalking the stage "like a bear trained to walk upright" and oozing a pious cant, Harold Skimpole sketching a flattering pen-drawing with one hand and borrowing money with the other, and the perpetually astonished Badger staring in rapt admiration at his much-married wife, all assert themselves with such emphatic reality that they emerge as the heroes of the evening.

Mr. Williams has done these pompous, high-handed and sometimes sniveling fools with uncanny insight, with enormous technical skill. He has phrased the Dickens prose to make it yield constantly mushrooming laughter, turning an offhand description of two paintings in the Snagsby household ("Mrs. Snagsby looking at Mr. Snagsby—Mr. Snagsby looking at Mrs. Snagsby—both in oils—plenty of it, too") into a model of pointed timing.

And he has been strikingly successful with a number of straightforward descriptive passages, evoking the slow suffocation which overtakes intruders in the Krook menage or the bewilderment of a boy on the loose in a turbulent London with swift, sure strokes.

If the major pawns in Dickens' elaborate puzzle—Lady Dedlock, Tulkinghorn, Inspector Bucket—are a good bit less interesting, that is partly due to the cutting, partly due to Mr. Williams' transparent inability to fall very much in love with them. Otherwise, the lapses in a generally ingratiating evening are inconsequential ones: Williams still has a tendency to overelaborate his pantomime (as in an exercise on the pianoforte) and a habit of laying it on thick as the comedy becomes lower (as in the not especially bright business of Foodle, Noodle, Doodle and Moodle). But even here there is increased restraint over last season's "Evening With Dickens," that series of unrelated excerpts which is being alternated with "Bleak House" at the Bijou, and the new bill finds Mr. Williams an assured, inventive and commanding performer.

This one-man "Bleak House" isn't going to relieve you of the necessity of sometime reading the book. But as Dickensian vaudeville, it's good, spirited fun.

Journal American
April 21, 1953

You've Got to Love Dickens--That's All

By JOHN McCLAIN

LAST year Emlyn Williams made the singular discovery that a great many New Yorkers are fans of Charles Dickens, and that they will cheerfully pay plush prices to hearken to readings of his works.

To create a proper theatrical illusion Mr. Williams decked himself out with a beard and a reasonable facsimilie of Mr. Dickens' evening wear and forthwith presented a program of excerpts from several of his more notable novels.

Whether or not this constituted theatre, in the strict sense of the word, the fact remained that he had a successful run here and elsewhere throughout the country.

Last night he returned to the Bijou Theatre in the same guise, this time delivering a condensation of "Bleak House," one of the first and certainly most exhaustive "thrillers" ever written.

Reservations

Once again certain reservations must be observed in reviewing the proceedings. The customer must be a devoted follower of Dickens and should be prepared to exert the proper patience through the early stages of the evening when the long cavalcade of characters are introduced.

For although Mr. Williams has managed skillfully to reduce the novel to one twenty-fifth its original size, there still remain thirty-odd highly divergent types to be accounted for, to say nothing of a rasher of sub-plots, and several thousand words describing London and the general state of society of the period.

It is a consummate tribute to Mr. Williams as an actor, therefore, that the customers hold still. Without moving more than an arm's length away from the desk which holds his book he succeeds by gesture and inflection in creating the personalities of the myraids of people involved—a lady of fashion, a street-crossing sweeper, a family solicitor.

In fact, his most popular characters were those only remotely connected with the plot: Mr. Turveydrop, proprietor of a dancing school, and Mrs. Bayham Badger, a thrice-married society bore.

Exhibits Talents

Which leads one to question the choice of "Bleak House" as suitable material for an entire evening of this sort. As presented it is split into three acts, the first of which is devoted almost entirely to description and the introduction of characters.

The plot comes to life part way through Act Two and from then on there are moments of suspense and impact, congealing in a quiet acceptable switch ending.

But along the way there are laggard and meaningless sequences when everything stands still while Mr. Williams exhibits his talents as an impersonator. Magnificently done, all of them, but one is eager to get on with the yarn.

You've got to love Dickens—that's all.

For his present limited engagement of three weeks Mr. Williams will present "Bleak House" tomorrow evening, Wednesday matinee and Thursday and Friday evenings.

On Saturday afternoon and evening he will offer his "mixed bill" from last season, and for the rest of the series you'd better consult your daily listings.

The New York Times
April 21, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

If Emlyn Williams continues this business of impersonating Charles Dickens it is going to be as difficult to separate the pair as it is to think of Raymond Massey as any one other than Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Williams began his legalized masquerading as the great master novelist of English literature with a rendition of a group of selections he presented here last year. Now, after a tour from coast to coast, he is back in town, at the Bijou, in a solo performance of Dickens' "Bleak House." And the impact is much the same. Mr. Williams, as long as he is on the stage, is Charles Dickens—though one must add, it is most unlikely that Dickens could act as well.

From the initial moment that the British actor-playwright strode to the red velvet-covered copy of the lectern that Dickens himself used when he was engaged in the triumphant reading of his works, the effect was powerfully commanding.

* * *

For Mr. Williams is an actor of tremendous range and his voice has an amazing flexibility. He can roar with fury and whisper so that pathos overwhelms an audience. His eyes can flash with anger and become soft with pity. His virtuosity can traverse a galaxy of some thirty-six characters and, with immaculate enunciation of the imagery of Dickens' writing, he can conjure each of the players in the grim story so that they live vividly in their places.

It must be said at this point, however, that Mr. Williams is most fortunate in being able to summon such talents as he possesses in order to hold his audience. For in undertaking the adaptation of "Bleak House" he has assumed a formidable task, indeed.

"Bleak House" is a monumental novel, sprawling over a wide canvas, full of serpentine plots and people. When Dickens wrote it in 1852-1853 he was launching a bitter attack on the Court of Chancery, on the machinery of the law and the devastating effects it had upon the citizens of England. It was full of social protest, savage satire, of unrestrained caricature.

Mr. Williams, of course, knew only too well what he was up against and in a program note there is the concession that he has had to distill "from the book a dramatic entertainment one-twenty-fifth of its length; and that if he stood up and read the masterpiece unabridged, the reading would take more than sixty hours and might overtax the audience as well as himself."

The pruning process, however, has not been too successful. The full scope of the novel has been necessarily lost. The major characters, Mr. Krook, Harold Skimpole, Mr. Snagsby, Lady Dedlock, are still around. But after their acquaintance has been made, they tend to become a little heavy with repetition, a little tedious. Mr. Williams was more successful with his original program in which variety abounded and attention consequently did not wander.

These reservations are voiced by your correspondent in the full knowledge that they will not make any difference to the more ardent disciples of the Dickens cult, many of whom were in the audience last night giving every indication that for them Mr. Williams could not possibly err. They roared at the thrusts at British society, savored with delight the cartoons of Lord Boodle, the Rev. Mr. Chadband and Mrs. Jellyby. They sat silent and hushed, rapt in the characterization of the wicked Mr. Krook and the ill-starred street-crossing sweeper, Jo.

But, granting the specialists their special field day, and granting all of Mr. Williams' powers, this department cannot refrain from wishing that he had continued with the earlier format. Certainly, Dickens left enough of his works on the shelves to be dusted off for variety's sake. Which brings up the fact that Mr. Williams will not be neglecting his original program. He will be doing it again during his current limited engagement.

L. F.

DAILY NEWS
April 21, 1953

Emlyn Williams Performs 'Bleak House' and It's a Prodigious Feat

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Last season Emlyn Williams captivated us by impersonating Charles Dickens and "reading" nicely assorted fragments of Dickens' writings. Last evening at the Bijou Theatre he performed an even more prodigious feat by offering a distillation of an entire and enormous Dickens novel, "Bleak House."

I doubt if Dickens could have done it himself, for he was not an editor. (If he had been, his works would have been shorter.) Williams, besides being a most resourceful and most charming actor, is an inspired editor, and nobody but he could extract the pith from "Bleak House" and present it in one evening in the theatre. His own footnote to the program explains that it would take more than 60 hours to read the whole novel aloud, and this "might overtax the audience as well as himself."

Greatest of Ease.

The marvel of the Williams performance is not the complexity of characters (there are 36 of them speaking) nor the pure Dickensian flavor of the proceeding; it is the ease with which it is done—the ease and the fine, glinting humor. It is a rare theatrical feat, for it is an artistic accomplishment rather than a stunt.

Even with Williams' clear-headed editing, "Bleak House" is no Mickey Spillane scenario. Plot is thick and incidents are thicker, and a whole evening's narrative of Lady Dedlock, her unacknowledged daughter, Esther, the slow progress of the Court of Chancery and the small villainies of such folk as Mr. Krook, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle may be a greater strain on the attention than can be supported by the person who may be less than daffy over Dickens.

Gripping Scenes.

But Williams is a master of his task. He can make you smell and feel a London fog, shrink back from a tenement, laugh at pomposity, feel a great pity when the boy Jo dies and thrill with pleasant horror when Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle wait at midnight for Mr. Krook to fall asleep.

"Bleak House" will be performed more or less alternately with the "Mixed Bill" which Williams offered last season. For the schedule, consult the ads.

New York Post
April 21, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Mr. Dickens Presents 'Bleak House'

Emlyn Williams, who supplied such a treat for us old Dickens fans when he read from the works of the Master last season, now provides another striking tour-de-force by presenting a solo performance devoted to that massive and wonderful novel, "Bleak House." But "Bleak House" offers monumental problems in its bulky and profuse grandeur, and, for all his brilliance, Mr. Williams' heroic effort to condense it into an evening's entertainment at the Bijou Theater last night proved considerably less successful than his earlier program of assorted selections.

No one could conceivably blame the distinguished English actor for carving vast sections from so huge a novel, or for being forced to leave out a number of important characters due to the exigencies of time. Despite a few objections to his editing that I'll go into later, Mr. Williams deserves great credit for retaining so much of the letter and spirit of the work. It is merely that, when cut down to the limits of a theatrical evening, the characters become so sketchy and the narrative so cluttered that it is confusing even to Dickens veterans.

The Grotesques

It is not surprising that the effect is, on the whole, happier when Mr. Williams is presenting the incidental characters than when he is going into the plot, where Dickens, too, sometimes stumbled. When the actor, made up as the author, is giving us glimpses of such splendid grotesques as Harold Skimpole, the Rev. Mr. Chadband, Mr. and Mrs. Bayham Badger, and the Turveydrops, father and son, his one-man show is at its most entertaining, even though he is forced to give us portraits of so many of them that the effect must be puzzling to those unfamiliar with the novel.

For plot purposes, the actor-editor has pretty much dropped the central situation and theme of the legal tragedy inherent in the interminable suit in chancery of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce. Instead, he has concentrated on the more melodramatic story of Lady Dedlock's misfortunes and the murder of the disagreeable solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn. Being an immensely skillful performer, Mr. Williams makes many of these highly-colored episodes admirably

exciting, but, even under his talented touch, the diffuseness of the narrative gets stubbornly in his way.

The Tragic Carstone

I am sure that not even the most ardent Dickensian will object to the way the role of Esther Summerson, the novel's heroine, has been whittled down. Esther was a fine and noble woman, but she was also considerable of a bore. But I, for one, regret the complete omission of Richard Carstone, the chief victim of the Jarndyce proceedings, because Carstone is the most authentic tragic figure in all of Dickens, and the manner in which the nobility of his character disintegrated was one of the subtlest achievements of a great novelist not famous for subtlety.

It strikes me, also, that the ending Mr. Williams uses, while dramatically effective, may mislead those who have not read the novel into the belief that Lady Dedlock was the murderess of Mr. Tulkinghorn. Finally, I'm sorry so little is made of Inspector Bucket and the touching Caddy Jellaby, but this is probably quibbling. Let me try to get this straight: Emlyn Williams' manipulation of the multitudinous scenes and people of "Bleak House" is a genuinely remarkable histrionic and editing feat, and a great deal of the author's spirit emerges in his impersonation of the great man in action. But the novel's diffuseness does baffle him.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 21, 1953

Bleak House' Solo Is Gripping

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Nobody in show business is quite so independent as Emlyn Williams with his brilliant solo readings from Dickens, and very few are nearly so phenomenal.

Last night the British actor offered a local premiere of his own treatment of "Bleak House." The performance is fabulous.

Overtones Increased.

There will be inevitable comparisons with the program of various Dickens excerpts, which he did with huge success last year. He will repeat them on certain nights of the present run. "Bleak House" is less flashy, less brilliant, but more substantial, and more deeply impressive.

To real Dickens familiars, it may be that the Williams' version of "Bleak House" will seem thinned out. The great novelist's vast panoramas grew from a wealthy imagination, but also the episodic demands of serial publication. Mr. Williams has calmed down the story here so it has an inevitable drive, and increases its load of sinister overtones as surely and darkly as a gathering tempest.

The basic story is a typical Victorian plot, reminiscent of "East Lynne." The crux of the narrative is a bundle of letters which may reveal an old scandal in the life of Lady Dedlock. Her illegitimate child has been reared by her sister, but unfortunately looks just like her.

Would she commit murder to spare her husband?

Conflict Grows.

At first the work seems sprawling as various characters are lined in. But the conflicts grow, and the atmosphere, the feeling of dread, continues to thicken, even when the mood is comical.

Mr. Williams ostensibly reads the story, when he wants to begin new settings or moods. The rest of the time he simply tells it. The lights change in color and intensity, but he never moves from behind his reading desk. The drama comes from voice, a few gestures and artful acting.

Mr. Williams makes a pause serve as an underline. A glance turns simple phrases into cynical contempt. From an actor with sensational tendencies, he has become a master of subtle showmanship. His significant readings brighten Dickens' phrases without distorting them.

The work is filled with memorable descriptions. The Jellybys, whose curtain is fastened up with a fork; Mrs. Piper, who persists in calling a dead man "the plaintiff"; Turveydrop, the dancing master, who is "pinched in, swelled out, got up and strapped down."

Mr. Williams' variety, taste and subtle invention are all extraordinary.

The oily manner of Chadband makes you squirm and laugh, and the death of Joe is deeply moving. Finally there is a terrible sequence in which two men find an old peddler "burnt to ashes from within by spontaneous combustion."

All this has the suspence of the most ingenious creator of sinister moods and the luxury of story-telling genius. It is an evening of dark and passionate adventure that often makes your eyes feel as if they were on stalks.

Daily Mirror

April 21, 1953

Those Who Haven't Seen Williams Should Do So

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After a tour of 46 American cities, Emlyn Williams has returned to us again as Charles Dickens. He is giving, at the Bijou Theatre, his solo arrangement of "Bleak House," alternating it with the "Mixed Bill" that proved so delightful last season. Personally, we are inclined to think that all but the most confirmed Dickensians will prefer the latter.

"BLEAK HOUSE" is a titanic tome. Williams estimates it would take him over 60 hours to read it in its entirety. So, of necessity, he has made a condensation but one twenty-fifth the length of the original. He has had to sacrifice some of the familiar characters, retaining only those most important to the story line.

The Williams version relies more upon characterization than it does upon action. And that's a major flaw in a one-man show. The entire first act is devoted to introducing Dickens' fantastically named people. And the audience isn't let in on Lady Dedlock's secret past and nefarious deeds until too late in the evening. She was, of course, concealing the existence of an illegitimate daughter, via murder.

Williams, looking remarkably like Dickens, standing at a replica of the red plush desk used by the author for his magnetic "readings," performs "Bleak House" with persuasive skill. With spotlights upon him, changing color to match the differing moods, he has remarkable success in bringing to life the humorous, the frightened, the pathetic and the determined characters.

• • •

HE HAS, ALAS, less success in conveying the melodramatic, suspenseful elements of the narrative. It is extremely difficult for one unfamiliar with the huge, sprawling novel to be certain just what it is all about. Clarity is not one of the virtues of this unusual presentation. The flavor is there, but the drama is lacking.

If we were going to meet Dickens in the person of the gifted Williams, we should do so through the "Mixed Bill" rather than "Bleak House." For the program of short sketches is really made up of rewarding and fascinating vignettes and playlets—some poignant, some tensely dramatic, some hilarious.

Williams was nothing short of magnificent in the "Mixed Bill" last season. He held the first-nighters spellbound. He had them applauding appreciatively, enthusiastically, demanding more at the final curtain's fall. This time, however, he has undertaken a far more difficult task, and has not brought it off so satisfyingly, so felicitously.

• • •

WE HAVE great admiration for Williams' courage in attempting a solo dramatization of "Bleak House." Within the terms of what he has set out to do, he has done it with amazing competence, if not with hypnotic compulsion. It is too often a task rather than a pleasure, to sit through "Bleak House." There are too many spots that are taxing rather than arresting.

S. Hurok has booked the Williams one-man bills into the Bijou for a limited engagement of three weeks. We think everyone who has reveled in the works of Dickens will want to see them. And we recommend that those who have not yet seen Williams as Dickens should do so. Preferably at the "Mixed Bill."

"A Date With April"

Daily Mirror

April 16, 1953

'A Date With April' Opens With Constance Bennett

By ROBERT COLEMAN

One of those innocuous, ineffectual little farces that are apt to pop up in the Spring arrived at the Royale Theatre last evening. It's called, appropriately enough, "A Date With April." It's by the George Batson who has shown promise over the years, but never fulfilled it. Kenneth Banghart and Diana Green are the producers.

Perhaps the big news is that Constance Bennett is making her Broadway bow in the feather-weight opus. Come to think of it, that's a misnomer. For though the material is slight, its effect is leaden. An evening at the Royale, brief though it is, seems like a weekend at a dull Summer resort. One of those places where everyone is working hard to have a good time and not succeeding very well.

FRANKLY, "A DATE WITH APRIL" is just too wispy for these demanding times. It has to do with a pretty modern-music composer and a peripatetic writer who've been having an off-again-on-again romance for several years. Just as a handsome movie star asks the girl to do a score for his next film, up pops the novelist.

The composer thinks her boy friend is having an affair with a nightclub dancer, when he's really only talking over a television deal with an aged dowager. So the musician has a fling with the Hollywood glamor guy to make the author jealous. To complicate matters further, his weekly high-school sweetheart arrives on the scene. But that's enough. The temperamental lovers get married in the end.

Miss Bennett displays remarkable stage presence for one making a Main Stem debut. As the female Gershwin, she is easy on the eyes and wears some smart costumes. In fact, the most attractive thing about "A Date With April," from the ladies' point of view, at least, is its impromptu fashion show.

Edmon Ryan, as the restless scribe, and Herbert Evers, as the screen luminary, make the most of their opportunities. Louise Larabee is good as a resourceful secretary. And Marjorie Peterson plays a rustic contest-winner in the broad key set for her by director Reginald Denham.

* * *

AN ENJOYABLE asset of "A Date With April" is Evelyn Varden, as the composer's mother, elderly but with young ideas. To her falls, by all odds, the best dialogue of the evening, and she capitalizes on it magnificently. What a trouper! Her sassy repartee with a telephone operator is hilarious.

Robert O'Hearn has designed a pleasant drawing room, but unfortunately it is seldom tenanted by much of moment.

Batson is indefatigable. He's always writing. He must love the theatre, and this should command a reviewer's respect. We trust that he will hit the jackpot one of these days. He can pen breezy and bright lines, but they usually come at uncomfortably infrequent intervals.

He seldom gets below the surface. His plots are obviously contrived. But he has enormous patience and enthusiasm. Right now, these virtues are likely to be rewarded by, at best, revenues from Summer stock, for "A Date With April" is too frail for Broadway.

"A DATE WITH APRIL"

Comedy by George Batson; staged by Reginald Denham; setting by Robert O'Hearn; presented by Kenneth Banghart and Diana Greene at the Royale Theatre, April 15, 1953. The cast:

Bella.....Louise Larabee
Tony Poole.....Herbert Evers
Val Corbett.....Edmon Ryan
Mrs. Ashley....Evelyn Varden
Elsa Ashley..Constance Bennett
Phyllis Lundgren.....
Marjorie Peterson

New York Herald Tribune

April 16, 1953

THEATER

'A Date With April'

By WALTER F. KERR

"A DATE WITH APRIL," the new play in which Constance Bennett is ill-starred, is one long tissue of misunderstandings, the most serious of which is author George Batson's notion that he has written a comedy.

True, the whole spic-and-span company at the Royale play the show as though they found it, or perhaps their salaries, irresistible. There is hell's own amount of unctious good nature. Everybody beams cheerfully at everybody else. One by one the performers take to chuckling through their lines, as though each had been reminded of something intolerably funny which had happened at rehearsal but never had quite got itself written into the show. And when they aren't bubbling benignly at one another, they are slyly drumming their fingers on the furniture, archly lifting their eyebrows, and wickedly intimating that something devastating has been going on between scenes.

The thread—gossamer would seem coarse beside it—on which these playful little baubles are strung has to do with a concert pianist (Miss Bennett) who has been living, off and on, with a globe-trotting, trout-fishing novelist (Edmon Ryan in a Hemingway beard). The pianist is apparently weary of working on her concerto (called, I believe, "Anger and Morbidity") and thinks it is high time her peripatetic paramour came across with a wedding ring. To advance this cause, she takes to gadding about the night clubs with a Hollywood swain, the while her true love works hard to sell some television scripts to a seventy-year-old matriarch (here mistaken—don't ask me how—for a notorious fan dancer), the while the pianist's mother hovers over the madcap confusion with a juicy relish for each romantic detail.

The miracle of "A Date With April" is that Evelyn Varden, as the fun-loving mother, makes her share of Mr. Batson's drowsy dialogue seem impishly bright. It's a shell game, through and through, but Miss Varden is an unprincipled old con-girl who, by shifting an intonation into her upper sinuses or by running two or three lines together so rapidly that the one in the middle seems as though it must have been hilarious, turns goulash into gold. It's a lesson in theatrical first-aid to hear her wangling a really big laugh out of a swift blend ("I don't drink this early in the morning—oh, I didn't know it was so late"), or making sound comedy out of the business of getting telephone information ("I'm sorry, we have no directory, we ate the directory"), or cooing an astonishing "Good morning" in the voice of a come-hither cuckoo.

Constance Bennett is svelte in a series of rose, black, red and sequined gray gowns whipped up for her by Saks Fifth Avenue and Tina Lesser. In this, her Broadway debut, she also displays an attractively confident manner and a pleasantly husky, straightforward delivery. She is not, however, the black magician Miss Varden is. Given the some sort of exchange ("She's around thirty!" "How many times around?") she leaves the lines in the precise, pristinely limp, condition in which they tumbled from Mr. Batson's typewriter.

And she has been saddled with some horrendous problems: a scene in which she must mistake a Hollywood star for a dangerous psychopath given to whipping off his clothes at a moment's notice; and an inadvertently complicated piece of business in which she must joke about having her piano-playing dubbed onto a movie soundtrack at the same time that her piano-playing is actually being dubbed from backstage at the Royale. There is an involved point about dramatic illusion to be made here, but it is going to take me some months to work it out.

Edmon Ryan closes his eyes in comic pain, slaps his hands to his forehead, and does all he can with expostulations like "Absurd!" and "Just what are you trying to say?" Herbert Evers winces his way through the passage in which he is taken for a lunatic, and otherwise settles for a sort of purring charm, making love to a telephone and to Miss Bennett with equal ardor.

It is Mr. Evers, though, who has the evening's most perceptive line: "This has been done before, you know—even Hollywood's given it up."

I guess April is still the cruellest month of all.

The New York Times

April 16, 1953

Constance Bennett Makes Her Broadway Debut in 'Date With April' at Royale

Although George Batson's comedy, "A Date With April," has been traveling around the countryside for many months, it actually has been standing still. Only sheer persistence, unwavering faith or plain downright stubbornness pushed it into the Royale for its premiere last night. To be sure, this is hardly the way to extend greetings to its star, Constance Bennett, who, as the eldest of the late Richard Bennett's acting daughters, is making her first appearance on the Broadway stage. But, after all, there is a limit to a reviewer's chivalry.

"A Date With April" happens to be one of those poor little comedies which, while meaning no offense to anyone, simply weighs itself down with dullness. Its mechanics are in evidence from just about the first strained gag and there is no doubt what will happen once a few slight problems are straightened out, as, for instance, who was in whose bedroom last night.

* * *

One of the principals in the current triangle is a novelist who, if he isn't off hunting seals in Alaska, is somewhere in Madrid studying the slaughter of bulls. He also sports a beard and clearly any resemblance to another writer is purely coincidental. His rival is a movie idol, and the lady to whom they both tilt is a composer-pianist who really loves the novelist but who is terribly jealous. Well, there you have it. And it all takes three acts of rather futile conversation before the novelist wins out.

Miss Bennett, like some other Hollywood actresses who have come to Broadway, gets ample opportunity to stage a personal fashion parade through the noon period of one day, the evening of another and the morning of still another. As for a chance to act, the opportunity is scanty. Her role limits her to tossing her blonde tresses when she is angry and smiling sweetly when she is gay.

Indeed, there is little chance for anyone to make very much out of the roles allotted—Edmon Ryan, as the novelist; Herbert Evers, as the movie idol; Marjorie Peterson, as the dizzy dame from the novelist's home town, and Louise Larabee, as the maid.

About the only one who appears at home is Evelyn Varden, who manages to give the impression of enjoying herself as the featherbrained mother of the musician. Since Miss Varden usually can make even an unfunny line sound funny, she is always good to have around. Reginald Denham is credited with having tried to bring some life to the play as the director, and Robert O'Hearn is listed as the designer of one of those airy living rooms in which everyone would like to dwell at least once.

L. F.

DAILY NEWS

April 16, 1953

'Date With April' as Mild as May

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The play which Constance Bennett has chosen for her New York stage debut, "A Date With April," is no very great test of her resources as a comedienne, but it does reveal her as a handsome woman with a nice taste in clothes. It is one of those defenseless and practically artless comedies—a nice thing for the Summer circuit, perhaps, or for an amateur group looking for something in one set for two men and four women, but hardly bright enough or novel enough to make a sensation in the toughest and most competitive theatre district in the world.

An Amiable Cast.

"A Date With April" opened last evening at the Royale Theatre. Its author, George Batson, tells a standardized story of parlor sophistication. A successful composer and pianist (Miss Bennett) and a super-successful novelist (Edmon Ryan) have been conducting an intermittent love affair for years. When they quarrel he leaves her flat and her flat. Then, after eight months of wolfing around the globe he comes back. This time she gets him for keeps by goading him into a proposal of marriage.

In a "sophisticated" comedy like this there is only one way for a woman to get her man. She must make him jealous by pretending to have an affair with somebody else. In this case the other fellow is a handsome movie star.

Anybody with a fair aptitude for dialog could write a thing like this with one arm tied behind his back—his good arm—and Batson has met the test. The producers, Kenneth Banghart and Diana Green, and the director, Reginald Denham, have provided Miss Bennett with some amiable actors.

Evelyn Varden, who can make anything look and sound funnier than it is, has the role of Miss Bennett's mother. Mr. Ryan, an experienced comedian, is okay as Lover Boy, and so is Herbert Evers as the screen idol. Marjorie Peterson livens things with her caricature of a small-town housewife on her first visit to this wicked city, and Louise Larabee is attractive as a helpful secretary.

Journal-American

April 16, 1953

Play's Better Off Touring Sticks

By JOHN McCLAIN

FOR several months Constance Bennett and a small group of fellow artisans have been touring the country in a new vehicle by George Batson called "A Date With April."

Last night they chose to bring it to New York, to the Royale Theatre, where the opinion seemed to be that they would have been better advised to stay in the sticks. It is a dreary and ostentatious effort all around.

Mr. Batson has strung up a series of ersatz characters and has attempted to keep them dancing for a couple of hours at the end of a frazzled line.

From the first entrance there is never the slightest doubt about the outcome and the period intervening is not sufficiently charming or hilarious to justify waiting around for the inevitable curtain. There may be people alive like these, but I have been fortunate enough never to have encountered them.

In the very first inning we find Edmon Ryan, an author, returning from abroad and bursting into the apartment of Constance Bennett, a concert pianist, with whom he has obviously been engaged in a long and intimate love affair.

Endless time and travail could have been saved by having them go out and get married then and there. But Mr. Batson needed two more acts, so he introduced a young movie hero, Herbert Evers, to keep the ball in the air for the remaining stanzas.

Convenient Trip

Mr. Evers, it seems, wants Miss Bennett to write a score for his next picture (actors are now musical supervisors for their own pictures?)—and while she is thus occupied he falls hopelessly in love with her.

Ryan has meantime conveniently gone off on an innocent business trip which is, of course, construed to be another faithless fling with a floosie.

Through all this there is the comical mother of Miss Bennett, who wears a pink wig, and a young matron from Ryan's home town who turns up for a two-week fling in the big city. Naturally, she drinks.

Then there is that scene in which the movie star innocently spends the night on the sofa, thus arousing the dormant and honorable emotions of the hero, who gets there just in time for breakfast—and the final fade-out.

In justice to Miss Bennett, who was making her first appearance on the Broadway stage last night, it must be said that she made a valiant effort with a puerile part.

"A Date With April" is no true test.

Mr. Ryan put up a game but losing battle with an implausible role, but I'm not sure I would have believed Mr. Evers, as the screen star, regardless of the writing.

Evelyn Varden, the mother, provided the few solid laughs of the evening—a sincere triumph of timing and inflection over mediocre material. Marjorie Peterson and Louise Larabee, as the matron and maid, completed the cast.

Again, one is obliged to wonder why this show didn't stay on the road—where it belongs.